



SBMA's Technology E-Newsletter

From the Communications Team at Southern Building Material Association, Inc.

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"MEMBERSHIP PAYS WHEN YOU PARTICIPATE."

This SBMA newsletter is meant to give you new ideas and thoughts concerning those technology issues that are important to our industry and your business.

CONTENTS

Section 1 Are you ready for the second wave of social media?

Section 2 Technology Updates for Small Businesses

Section 3 Small Business Technology-Ten Tips to Green IT

SECTION 1 ARE YOU READY FOR THE SECOND WAVE OF SOCIAL MEDIA?

By [Jesse Stanchak](#)

When people ask what the next big thing in social media will be, they're usually looking for an ascendant platform that will supplant Facebook the way Facebook supplanted MySpace or they're expecting a feature set, such as geo-location or group messaging. But what if it's not a network or a tool? What if it's an application?

"Internal social media is the second wave ... the future of work is in communities," said Cisco's Andrew Warden at the recent Corporate Social Media Summit.

Warden gave the crowd four reasons to start looking at internal social tools:

- **The next wave of employees will expect it.** The current workforce has members of every generation who love social tools, as well as those who loathe them. But the next generation of workers will have no such divide, Warden argued. These workers will have grown up with these tools and will expect to use them as part of their internal work communications, because that's how they've always communicated. Failing to have an internal social media system in place would alienate these workers and keep them from fully contributing to the company, Warden said.
- **The workforce is increasingly global.** Global deals, branch offices and telework are going to become more common for companies of every stripe and if you want remote teams to work together and stay engaged with their mission, you need to give them tools to work collaboratively, just as if they were all in the office together, Warden noted. Social tools also make 24-hour operations and complex global deals easier on employees, by allowing work to pass easily between time zones, thus empowering work/life balance without a loss of continuity.
- **It can make management easier.** By watching internal social communications between employees, managers can figure out where their workers are spending the most time, where their pain points are and what resources are needed to enhance performance, Warden noted.
- **A strong corporate culture may depend on it.** The focus of social media so far as been on external branding — communicating your vision and values to your customers. But what about your employees? Do they understand the company's vision? Do they share it? Feel like they're a part of it? Live it out every day in their work? Warden notes that internal branding allows your company strategy to permeate the corporate culture, instead of working against it.

Of course, embracing internal social media will bring me fresh challenges, he notes. The technology is still evolving — Cisco decided to build their own internal tools rather than go with an outside vendor. Training is key,

particularly since broad guidelines such as “don’t do anything stupid” can mean radically different things to workers of different generations. And not every department will embrace such tools with the same vigor, possibly creating the need for incentive programs, he noted. All the more reason to get started now — before the next generation of workers shows up.

SECTION 2 TECHNOLOGY UPDATES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Technology is always changing. More than that, it’s always changing the way people do business with each other. Small businesses need to stay up on these changes in order to outmaneuver the competition and stay in the loop. Here are the top eight technological items every small business needs.

1. Smartphones: The internet is arguably the greatest revolution since the printing press. Smartphones are the easiest way to access the Internet at any time. Plus, smartphones provide SMS messages, calling capabilities and tons of other tools that business professionals can make use of.

2. Laptops: Desktop computers are great, but if you need to take a business trip you can’t make do with just your smartphone. These days, laptops weigh around five pounds, and there are also smaller options, netbooks, that weigh half that. But be careful, longer battery life, screen size, and power and computing capability are what you sacrifice when you choose a netbook instead of a notebook.

3. Tablets: The iPad is just one. Apps galore and a camera model will make the second generation even better than the first. Dell has one and other companies will soon release other tablets. Tablets are a great solution—or addition—to the dilemma of netbook or notebook.

4. VoIP Broadband Phone: VoIP service providers allow small businesses to place international calls for pennies. They also allow teleconferencing, and friends and business partners can place national calls as ordinary numbers by switching area codes.

5. Web Designer: These days it’s necessary to have an online presence. That means having a website, a Facebook pag, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a host of other internet marketing solutions if you want to be able to be found easily on a Google search. SEO can be outsourced or in-housed to take care of your marketing needs.

6. IT Services: Setting up and maintaining all of this technology can be tricky. It helps to have someone on staff who can solve your internet problems. Or you at least want to have the availability of a support service you can call or live chat.

7. Dropbox: This file sharing service allows you to store up to 2GB of documents and folders for free. After that you can buy more. It makes flash drives obsolete.

8. iGo: This portable projector makes video presentations a cinch. Just hook up and watch the 16:9 resolution filter onto a 70” area.

Ultimately, you want to utilize these technologies to increase sales. If you don’t think that these technological aspects will bring you new customers, it may not yet be time to invest in them. Either way, it’s good to know about the valuable changes and technologies affecting the business world.

SECTION 3 SMALL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY-TEN TIPS TO GREEN IT

By Gerry Blackwell

Small businesses can do their bit for the environment, *and* reduce costs, simply by being a little smarter about how

they use information technology. Start here with our top 10 green IT tips, compiled with help from consultant Roger Hyde, of ConsultITGreen. They're presented in no particular order.

1. Measure Usage

Examine current business practices to see where you're using energy now. How many computers, printers, phones, scanners, servers, faxes and other electronic devices do you own? How are they used? How much energy do they consume?

Your electric utility may offer free energy audits. Some may also offer networked meters that let consumers (and businesses) see how much energy they're consuming as they consume it. Measuring first not only helps you see where you could save, Hyde said, it also lets you see bottom-line benefits when you start implementing green IT practices.

If you use Intuit's popular QuickBooks small business accounting program (or even if you don't), take a look at the company's GreenSnapshot service. It estimates your carbon footprint, provides customized recommendations to help you go greener, and generates we're-a-green-business marketing materials.

2. Appoint a Green Team

Make green IT a company-wide responsibility. Appoint a green committee of employees from different areas and task them with developing ideas, plans and objectives. They should meet regularly -- during office hours.

The objective here is not just to delegate the responsibility or to come up with more good ideas than you might have thought of on your own -- although both are potential benefits. It's also a way to ensure that employees feel some ownership for whatever green IT initiatives you eventually decide to take, so they'll be more likely to support them.

A couple of things to keep in mind. Be sure to include employees you know are keen about green issues -- but not only those employees. And be prepared to implement the ideas your team produces.

3. Consolidate, Outsource

File this under stating the obvious, but the fewer devices you use, the less energy you use -- and the lower your costs.

Replace separate printers, faxes and scanners with multifunction printers (MFPs) -- once your old devices have worn out. Or use an iPhone instead of a laptop, cell phone and office phone, Hyde suggested.

Server consolidation, reducing the number of physical servers by running several logical servers on each machine using virtualization software, is another key initiative. Gartner estimates that every physical server eliminated through consolidation saves 7000kWh of electricity annually, or about \$700.

You can also consider the ultimate form of consolidation: outsourcing. Use shared data centers, hosted phone systems or cloud computing services. Outsourcers and service providers have to pay close attention to energy conservation -- it's one of their biggest costs -- and they spread energy usage and costs across multiple clients.

4. Turn Off and Unplug

The easiest way to reduce energy consumed by IT equipment is to switch it off. Turn off computers at night and configure PC power management utilities to shut down monitors and hard drives when they haven't been used for a few minutes.

If you want to see how much you save simply by turning off computers at night, check out this information on the U.S. government's Energy Star program website.

Even during the day, turn off peripherals such as printers and fax machines when no one is using them -- which in

many offices is most of the time. One radical suggestion: turn off your computer for a few hours every day. It saves power, but might also give you more time to think about your business and interact with employees and customers.

But simply switching off equipment is not enough on its own. Many devices draw power even when "off." Use power strips and unplug them at night (after powering down the attached devices.) Nokia, the cell phone maker, estimates that if its approximately one billion people worldwide unplugged their phones' battery chargers when not in use, it would save enough energy to power 100,000 European homes.

5. Buy Green

If you have to buy new equipment (see below), buy green. Study power consumption ratings for competing products and choose accordingly. Consider integrated devices such as MFPs.

The government's Energy Star program tests and rates every product that makes claims to energy efficiency (and can back them up). Some state governments offer rebates for buying Energy Star-compliant products -- mostly to consumers, but in some cases businesses too.

Just switching from a desktop computer and CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor to a laptop can save between 50 and 80 percent on energy consumption, according to the European Commission's Energy Star directorate.

6. Keep IT Equipment Longer

It's a fine balance. On the one hand, modern Energy Star-compliant equipment consumes less energy and costs less to run. On the other, upgrading to a modern product costs money and means disposing of old equipment, which all too often ends up in landfills.

It's almost always cheaper to add more memory or even a faster processor to an old computer, Hyde pointed out. And do you really *need* that new, faster PC? If you must buy new, donate old equipment or at the very least ensure that you dispose of according to EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) guidelines.

Some computer companies, including Dell and Hewlett-Packard, offer asset recycling programs, taking your old computer and disposing of it ethically when you buy a new one from them. Staples and Office Depot also offer e-waste recycling services.

7. Telecommute

Green IT has two aspects: reducing the carbon footprint of IT operations, and using IT to reduce carbon footprint elsewhere. Telecommuting -- sending employees home to work or to a satellite office closer to home -- is one way to use computers and telecommunications to reduce carbon footprint.

While computers and other electronics draw a lot of power, Hyde noted that the environmental damage and energy consumption associated with "firing up the SUV and driving into work," is far greater.

In a recent study titled 'Workshifting Benefits: The Bottom Line,' Telework Research Network (TRN) estimates that letting one employee work half-time away from the office saves a company about \$10,000 a year and the employee up to \$6,800.

TRN also estimates that the reduction in driving and gasoline consumption resulting from widespread adoption of telecommuting could cut greenhouse gas emissions nationwide by as much as 53 million metric tons.

8. Virtual Travel, Real Savings

A plethora of new, greatly improved and often very inexpensive online technologies make it possible to eliminate most business travel -- without jeopardizing the business.

Consider eliminating or reducing in-person meetings, even with customers, by using low-cost audio conferencing

solutions from providers such as Fidelity and 8x8, coupled with Web conferencing services such as WebEx.

To make online meetings more personal, use VoIP-based (voice over Internet protocol) videoconferencing, which costs very little, from providers such as Skype (which is free for two-person video conferences).

Tools such as Central Desktop and Zoho, designed more for non-simultaneous collaboration -- file sharing, collaborative document editing, etc. -- can make it feasible for highly distributed work teams to function smoothly without ever traveling to meet.

9. Go Paperless

Information technology was supposed to make this happen decades ago. It still hasn't, mainly because people can't seem to kick the paper habit. The first step: commit to going paperless. Then develop plans for managing the wrenching cultural change. Technology and enlightened policies can do much of the rest.

Reduce the number of printers available to employees. Educate them about the environmental and economic impact of printing. Automatically add a note to emails asking recipients not to print them.

Deliver marketing materials, reports, plans, bills, invoices, etc. electronically. If customers want to print them, they can. You save the cost of printing -- and reduce your carbon footprint. Tell others you can't accept paper that you don't have filing cabinet space, and paper will end up in the garbage.

10. Print Smart

Sometimes you *have* to print, but even when you do there are ways to reduce the cost and environmental impact.

Adjust printer configurations to ensure margins are the minimum width (to get more print per page), and make double-sided printing the default. When replacing printers, make sure the new ones make it easy to print double-sided.

Use "draft" mode when printing documents internally -- it uses less ink. Re-use paper for internal documents rather than throwing single-sided documents out after use. Finally, consider using Eco-font, a software-based sustainable printing system that uses up to 25 percent less ink.

Green IT for small businesses: it's not only easy to do, it's a no-brainer. You save the world and save your company money at the same time.

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